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COLLEGE PREPARATION: WHAT IS ITS EFFECT ON WHAT YOU TEACH AND HOW YOU TEACH IT?

BY AMELIA C. WIGHT.

This old world has known many famous teachers. We like to gain inspiration for ourselves sometimes by thinking of them—of Socrates; of Plato, the pupil and intimate friend of Socrates; of Kant, who has been called the modern Socrates; of Dr. Arnold, the great headmaster of Rugby “to whom it was given many to save with himself”; of Edward Thring whose great axiom was “The worse the material, the greater the skill of the worker”; and of many others whom I might mention and of whom you perhaps are thinking as I speak. We also like to think of the great army of men and women whose names we do not know, but who labored faithfully and untiringly in school-room and college-hall and who have quite as clear a title to the promise “They that be teachers shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.”

Of them all, however, there was just one perfect teacher and it is an utterance of His I should like to quote this afternoon. He said “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.” What were these things? Very needful things indeed—what men should eat, what they should drink, wherewithal they should be clothed. Nevertheless this was the command, “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”

May I, with all reverence, use this saying to emphasize the principal point I wish to make? A college preparatory class comes to me with the entrance examination or the need for the college certificate in the near future. What shall I do? Seek first the physical, mental and moral welfare of my girls, teach them their geometry and algebra in such fashion as to contribute

the utmost to their intellectual training—and the college preparation will be added.

If a teacher have this attitude toward her work certain results will follow. Of two of these I should like to speak very briefly.

First, the atmosphere of the class-room will be free from all unnecessary strain and stress, the whirl and clash of the machinery will be absent, and the pupils will be able to do better work and in quietness to find their strength.

Second, the word "Limits" so often spelled in capitals of the largest size will lose most of its terrors, and the teacher will have courage to "make haste slowly," especially at the beginning. I feel that we can not possibly overestimate the importance of making haste slowly, for many times that is the key to the entire situation. And—we teachers of mathematics have our troubles but we have surely this blessing: if our pupils thoroughly understand their work step by step, they gain in speed as the weeks pass. This is especially true in geometry, for a class completing with difficulty one proposition each period in October can take, with comparatively little effort, two, three or more propositions, depending upon their length and difficulty, during a period in February or March.

Then, too, would it not be wise to trust rather more than we do sometimes to the good judgment of the board of examiners? From our school we have sent many girls to Bryn Mawr College for their entrance examinations and I have grown to feel very confident that the department of mathematics of that college judges the papers largely for their general intelligence. Where that is done, there is surely no occasion for much anxiety because lack of time may necessitate the slighting of the preparation at one or more points.

In connection with the matter of college requirement, however, I feel very strongly that we are doing about all that should be expected of us in the way of preparation. Recently at the Philadelphia High School we were consulted by one of the leading colleges for women with regard to the advisability of including solid geometry among the requirements for admission to college and perhaps lessening slightly the requirement in algebra. While I do believe that logically the place for the solid geometry is the secondary school, nevertheless I hesitate about undertaking anything additional under existing conditions.

I have spoken of the absence of any whirl of the machinery in the class-room. May I suggest, however, that definite and careful planning of the work during the year on the part of the teacher and at the end a systematizing of the reviews for the students will materially save their time and strength and help to cover the ground? In the Philadelphia High School for Girls, among other things we do this for our pupils: Just before they take their examinations, we give them a list of examples, fifty or more, selected from one of their text books—examples not especially difficult, but requiring all the principles for which they are responsible. We print the page, the number of the example and the answer; and it has been our experience that even the girls not mathematically inclined are glad to avail themselves of this opportunity to review systematically. I am disposed to think also that success in working out these problems gives them a confidence in themselves that means much when the dreaded day of the examination arrives.

In concluding, may I say that sometimes we all of us feel it to be increasingly difficult to maintain a standard of excellence? We say, and I fear we are right, that children are much indulged in these days and that the almost universal sentiment seems to be against requiring of them any definite or burdensome tasks. Since misery surely loves company, I think I can cheer you somewhat by a quotation from John Locke. He had a number of crude and vicious ideas with regard to the education of children to be sure, but he lived in the seventeenth century, not in the twentieth, and *he* said: "None of the things children are to learn should ever be made a burden to them, or imposed upon them as a task." So the tendency to make life one long holiday for children is evidently not confined strictly to the days in which we are laboring. About once every year, I am in the habit of putting on my board one of the symbols of the School of Pythagoras: "Help men to burden, but not to unburden themselves." I explain its meaning very carefully and, trusting to its having a wholesome effect, I feel myself to be contributing a mite toward counteracting the present tendency to relieve our young people so completely of every burden that they are in danger of losing all sense of responsibility.

Finally, I should like to return to the thought with which I

began by reminding ourselves that one of the points upon which Horace Mann laid special emphasis in his famous "Annual Reports" was this: "The end of education should be the attainment of moral and social personality."

When one of my nephews was a very little child, I offered to give him one day either a silver dollar I happened to have in my purse or a penny. Without a minute's hesitation he chose the penny and his mother said with a smile, "The penny will buy candy, Auntie." Of the possibilities of the dollar in the direction of candy buying he had not the slightest notion. Do we not make a similar mistake when we forget that the silver dollar of education in the best sense of the word includes among other things good and great a *real* preparation for college?

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